A Plain Language Handbook



Write For Your Reader

Do you write or edit reports, letters, memos, minutes, brochures, or other documents?

This handbook gives you the tools to write or edit your documents in plain language.

Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment

N.W.T. LITERACY COUNCIL

The NWT Literacy Council wrote and produced this handbook. The Department of Education, Culture, and Employment, Government of the Northwest Territories funded the project.

A big thanks to the people who reviewed the handbook. Your comments were very helpful.

The project also produced a **Plain Language Audit Tool** as a separate document. You do an audit to find out if your documents use plain language.

If you have questions about plain language or this handbook, contact the NWT Literacy Council.

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The NWT Literacy Council offers plain language services. We can:

- Design and deliver plain language workshops that meet your needs.
- Edit your documents with plain language.
- Assess documents for plain language.
- Provide literacy profiles to help you understand your readers' needs.



Contents

Introduction to Plain Language



What is plain language?

Plain language is writing for your readers.

Plain language means you think about your readers and pay attention to:

- ☑ How you organize the information – you tell your readers what the document is about. You help them find the information they need.
- ☑ What you write – you include only the information your readers really need.
- ☑ How you write – you use words and grammar your readers understand. You speak directly to your reader.
- ☑ How you present the information – you use design techniques to help people read more easily.

Why should I write in plain language?

People need to be able to use written information to participate fully in society. Plain language helps people read, understand, and use written information.

Government, business, and nonprofit organizations use different types of documents:

- Forms and applications – income support, jobs, funding, legal aid, licences, housing.
- Reports – land use or economic plans, environmental assessments, discussion papers.
- Legal documents – land claims, insurance, wills, custody, impact benefit agreements, contracts, adoption, sentencing, unions.
- Brochures and booklets – health, social wellbeing, education, sports and fitness, employment, housing, daycare.
- Instructions and manuals – workplace health and safety, hazardous waste, elections, firearm safety, prescriptions.
- Internal documents – memos, briefing notes, decision papers, reports, meeting minutes, policies.
- Letters and memos.

Intro

Government, business, and nonprofit organizations use different documents to:

- Give people information.
- Change peoples' behaviour or thinking.
- Help people make decisions.
- Consult with people.
- Register people for programs or services.

When we talk, we get a direct response. We can use that response to choose words and a style and tone of speaking that help people understand.

When we write, we don't get the same direct response. But we can choose to write in plain language. Plain language guidelines are based on research about what helps people read and understand.

We all have a responsibility to produce written information that people can read, understand, and use so they can fully participate in society.

Myth: Plain language is simple-minded and talks down to people.

Fact: Plain language includes and respects people. People understand what they read. They get the information they need and not a lot of extras.

Myth: Plain language takes too long and costs too much.

Fact: Plain language saves time and money. When people understand what they read, they ask fewer questions, complain less, and make fewer mistakes. Their health and safety are more assured.

Myth: Plain language isn't necessary for people who read well.

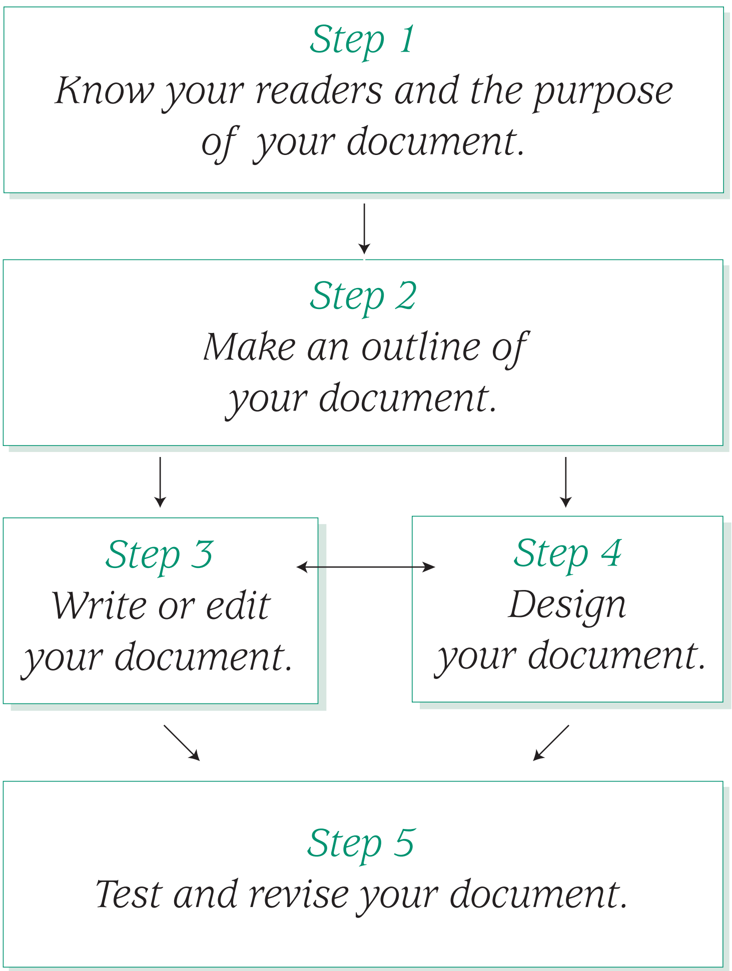
Fact: Pain language helps everyone understand what they read. People with good literacy skills skip over information, understand less, or just won't read a document that is too complex, wordy, or technical.

Myth: Plain language isn't good for legal and technical terms.

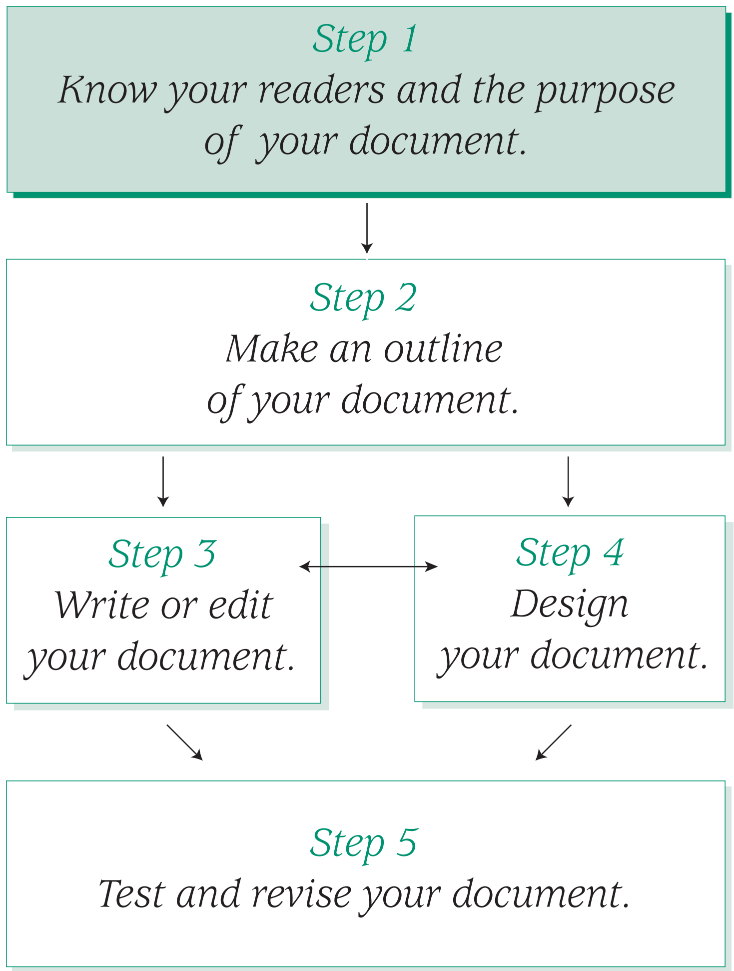
Fact: Plain language can be used with any document. You can define legal or technical terms so that people can understand and use the information.

The five basic steps to the plain language process.

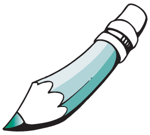
The plain language process has five basic steps. Use this process to write a new document or to edit a document that already exists.



The Plain Language Process



Step 1: Know Your Readers and the Purpose of Your Document



Before your write or edit anything, ask yourself:

- ☑ Who are my readers?
- ☑ Where and when will my readers use this document?
- ☑ What is the purpose of my document?
- ☑ What do my readers need to know?
- ☑ What type of document do I need?

Step 1

Who are my readers?

- Am I writing to one person or a group?
- If it's a group, do the people in the group have the same or different experiences and skills?
- Is there anything specific about the age, gender, or culture of my readers?
- Do I need to translate my document into other languages for people who don't read English?
- What literacy skills do my readers have?

  About 66 % of Aboriginal adults and 31 % of non-Aboriginal adults do not have the literacy skills needed for daily living.

  These people might not be able to:
  - Read directions on a medicine bottle.
  - Help their child with their homework.
  - Fill out a housing application.

  About 50 % of NWT adults have the literacy skills needed for daily living.

  These people might not understand:
  - A land claims or impact benefit agreement.
  - Medical information.
  - An environmental assessment report.
- What grade reading level should I aim for?

If your document is:	Aim for:
Essential information for people who have less than 8 years of school or whose first language isn't English.	Grade 5 to 6
Information for the general public that has new terms and concepts or specialized subject matter.	Grade 7 to 9
Specialized information for people who are familiar with the topic and who have good literacy skills.	Grade 10 +

When and where will my readers use this information?

- Will my readers be comfortable or under stress?
- Will my readers be in an office, at home, or outside?
- Will my readers have lots of time or be rushed?

Step 1

What is the purpose of my document?

- What do I want to happen when people read my document?
- What do I want my readers to be able to do after they read my document?
- Do I want or need something specific? Do I want to achieve or prevent something? Do I want to change peoples' behaviour?
- If I want to 'inform' people, what do I want them to do with the information?

What do my readers need to know?

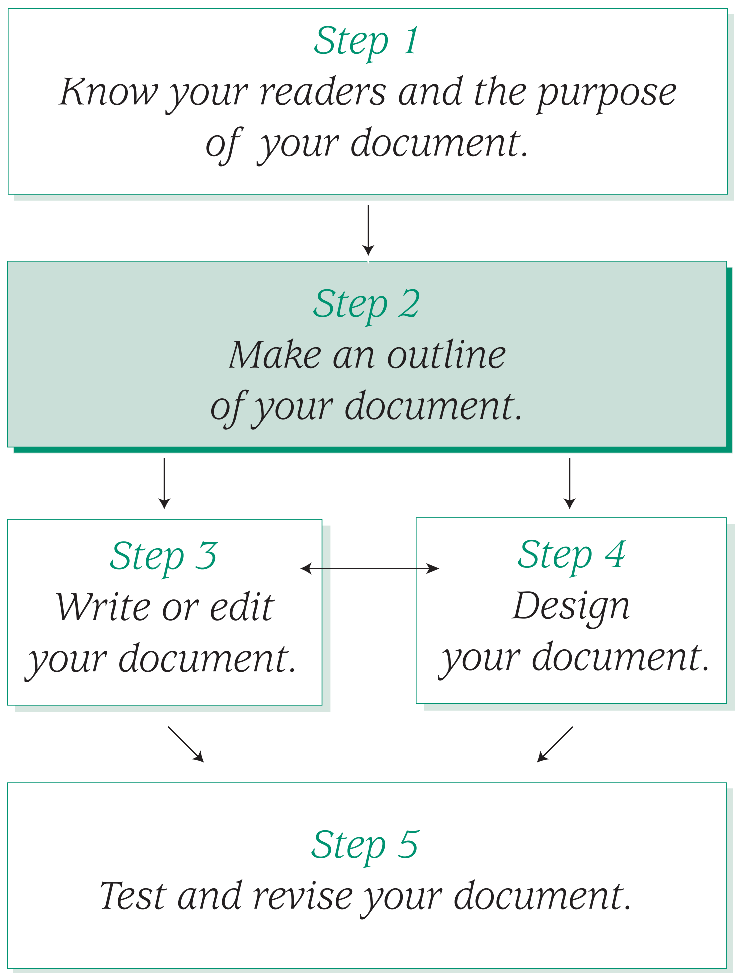
- What do people already know about this topic?
- Do they use other documents related to this topic? Do I need to use the same terms as other documents?
- What information do I need to include? What information can I leave out?
- What is the most important thing my readers need to know so they can respond?

What type of document is best?

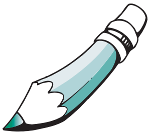
Look at all the information about your readers and the purpose of your document. Ask:

- What type of document is best for my readers to achieve my purpose? Brochure, booklet, report, letter, form, poster, or other? If I'm editing an existing document(s), should it be a different type of document?
- How many documents do I need? If I'm editing an existing document, should I combine two or more documents into one? Should I separate one document into two or more different documents?
- How long should my document be? What is the upper and lower limit?

The Plain Language Process



Step 2: Make an Outline



Before your write or edit anything, use this checklist of plain language guidelines to plan an outline for your document.

- ☑ Introduce your document.
- ☑ Organize your ideas in logical order.
- ☑ Divide your document into short sections.
- ☑ Put the most important information first.
- ☑ Use headings and subheadings.
- ☑ Include a Table of Contents for longer documents.

If you have a good outline, you'll spend less time writing and rewriting.

Step 2

Introduce your document.

- Tell your readers right away what the document is about.
- Tell your readers how the document is organized.

Organize your ideas in logical order.

Organize your ideas in a way that makes sense for your readers. Choose one way to organize your document and be consistent throughout:

- Step by step.
- Chronologically.
- From general to specific or from specific to general.
- From what people already know to new information, or from new information to what people already know.

Divide your document into short sections.

- Put all the information about one thing in the same section.
- Organize each section in the same way your whole document is organized.

Put the most important information first.

- Start with the most important information so people don't miss it.

People often read only the first lines of a document or of each section of a document.

Use headings and subheadings.

Headings and subheadings:

- Help people find information.
- Make your document easier to scan.
- Make the way the document is organized more clear.
- Give useful information to your reader.

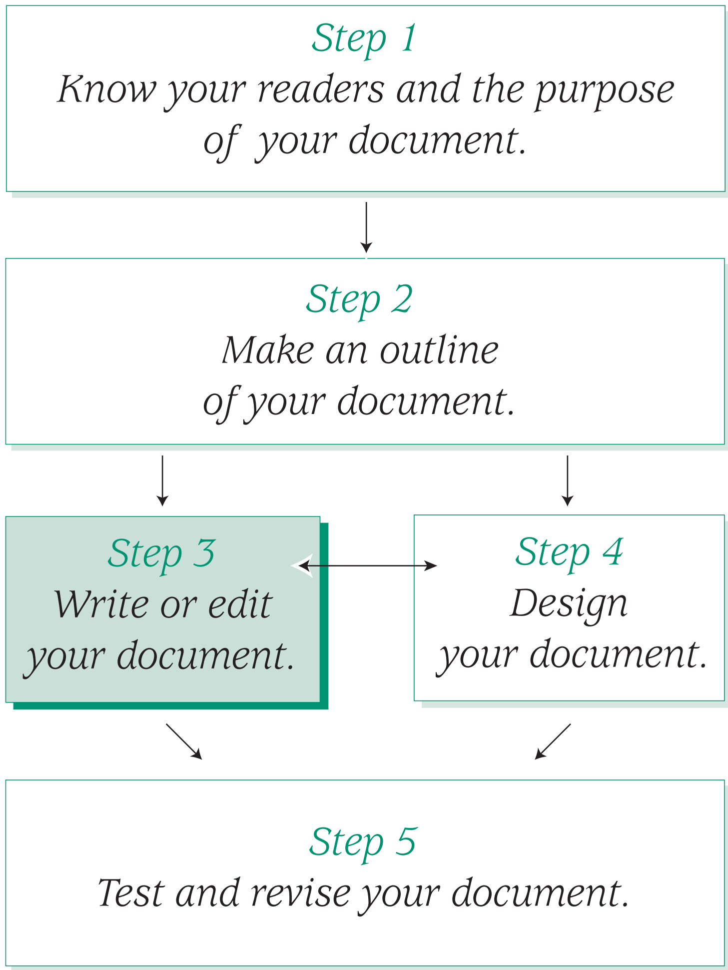
Do your headings and subheadings accurately describe what the section is about?

Include a Table of Contents for longer documents.

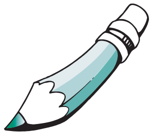
A Table of Contents:

- Tells your readers how the document is organized.
- Makes it easy to find information readers need.

The Plain Language Process



Step 3: Write or Edit Your Document



Use this checklist of plain language guidelines as you write or edit your document.

- ☑ Use simple, short, clear words.
- ☑ Write short sentences with just one idea in each sentence.
- ☑ Use a positive tone.
- ☑ Use an active writing style.
- ☑ Write short paragraphs.
- ☑ Use point form or lists where appropriate.

Use simple, short, clear words.

- Choose everyday words with 1 or 2 syllables if possible. Avoid jargon, chains of nouns, and double negatives.
- Change or take out wordy phrases.
- Choose concrete not abstract words.
- Use contractions such as don't and we'll.
- Use possessive 's or s' endings.
- Define technical terms or leave them out.
- Identify acronyms in the text.

Write this:	**Not this:**
present	not absent
show	demonstrate
if	in the event that
plan	strategize
he won't	he will not
department's policy	policy of the department

The **Alternate Word and Phrase List** on page 35 has examples of simple, short, clear words to replace complex, long, abstract words or phrases.

Use an active writing style.

- Use a simple form to write your sentences: Subject – Verb – Object.
- Make sure the subject of your sentence is the person or thing that does the action.

  Write: ‘The government decided...’
  Not: ‘It was decided by government...’

- Speak directly to your reader.

  Write: ‘If you need help...’
  Not: ‘People who require assistance...’

- Look for nouns that can be changed to verbs and rewrite the sentence. The sentence changes from a passive to an active style. The sentence is usually shorter.

  Write: ‘We’ll notify you...’
  Not: ‘You will receive notification...’

The **Nouns to Verbs List** on page 45 has more examples.

Write short sentences with just one idea in each sentence.

- Write sentences with no more than 20 to 25 words. Mix short sentences with longer ones.
- If a sentence has more than one idea, break it into shorter sentences.

Use a positive tone.

- Use a positive tone to engage people.

  Write: 'You can apply for a scholarship if you get 80 % or more.'
  Not: 'If you don't get at least 80 %, you can not apply for a scholarship.'

- Use a negative tone to indicate danger, to warn people, or to dispel a myth. For example, a booklet might say <u>what to do</u> and <u>what not to do</u> with an oil spill.

Step 3

Write short paragraphs – one idea each.

- Keep paragraphs to 4 or 5 sentences. Put the most important information first.
- Break up complicated information. Use different paragraphs for different ideas. Connect the idea in one paragraph with the idea in the next paragraph.

Use point form and lists if appropriate.

- Make a list for a group of similar things. Use bullets, arrows, or other small graphics to mark each item on the list.
- Give instructions in the order you want them done. Use numbers if appropriate.
- Use the same verb or noun form throughout the list.

Write like this:

We encourage you to use the Internet to make your work more effective. It is acceptable to use the Internet to:

- Do research.
- Correspond with colleagues, clients, or vendors.
- Develop your career.
- Provide public information.

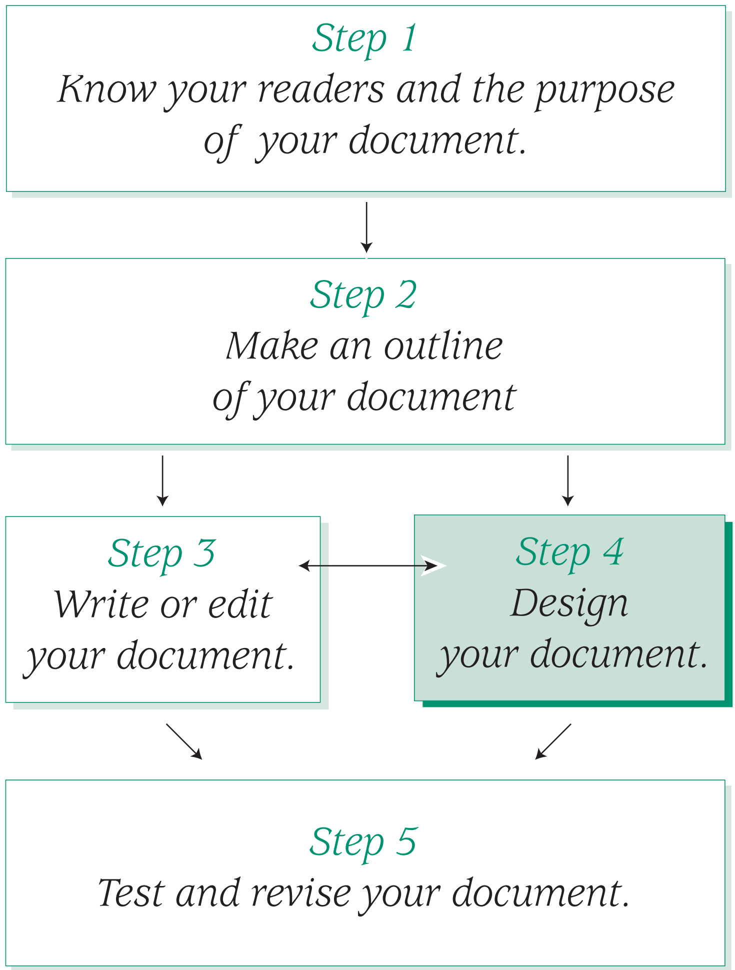
It is not acceptable to use the internet for personal interests that aren't related to your job.

Not like this:

Job related uses of the Internet include accessing external databases, libraries, newspapers, newsletters, magazines, bulletin boards or encyclopedias to obtain reference information or conduct research; corresponding with colleagues, government clients, and vendors; professional and career development; and provision of information to the public.

Using the Internet for any activities that are not job related (e.g. surfing or browsing for material of personal interest) is not acceptable.

The Plain Language Process



Step 4: Design your Document



Plain language design guidelines make your document easier to read. As you design your document, you might rewrite some parts. Use this checklist when you design your document:

- ☑ Use white space to break up the text.
- ☑ Highlight important information.
- ☑ Use fonts that people can read easily.
- ☑ Use photos, charts and other graphics to show information more clearly.
- ☑ Use colour effectively.

Use white space to break up the text.

- Use white space to separate paragraphs and sections of your document.
- Use margins at least one inch wide. Justify the left margin. Leave the right margin ragged.
- Use columns if they work well. Text in two columns on a 8 1/2 X 11 page is easier to read than text across the whole page.

Highlight important information.

- Use boxes around important information to make it more prominent.
- Use colour shading to add interest and set text apart.
- Use bullets, arrows or other small graphics for point form lists.
- Use *italics* to emphasize a word or phrase, or for phrases in other languages. Italics are hard to read, so limit their use.
- Use **bold print** or <u>underline</u> for titles or to add emphasis.
- Use all capitals only to draw attention to a heading or to make a brief statement, such as: KEEP OUT.

Use fonts that people can read easily.

- Use a serif font for the main text. A serif font has hooks on each letter. This is a serif font. This is a non-serif font.
- Use a different type of font for headings and subheadings.
- Use the same style and size of font in the same way throughout the document.
- Use capitals only where appropriate. ALL CAPITALS ARE HARD TO READ.

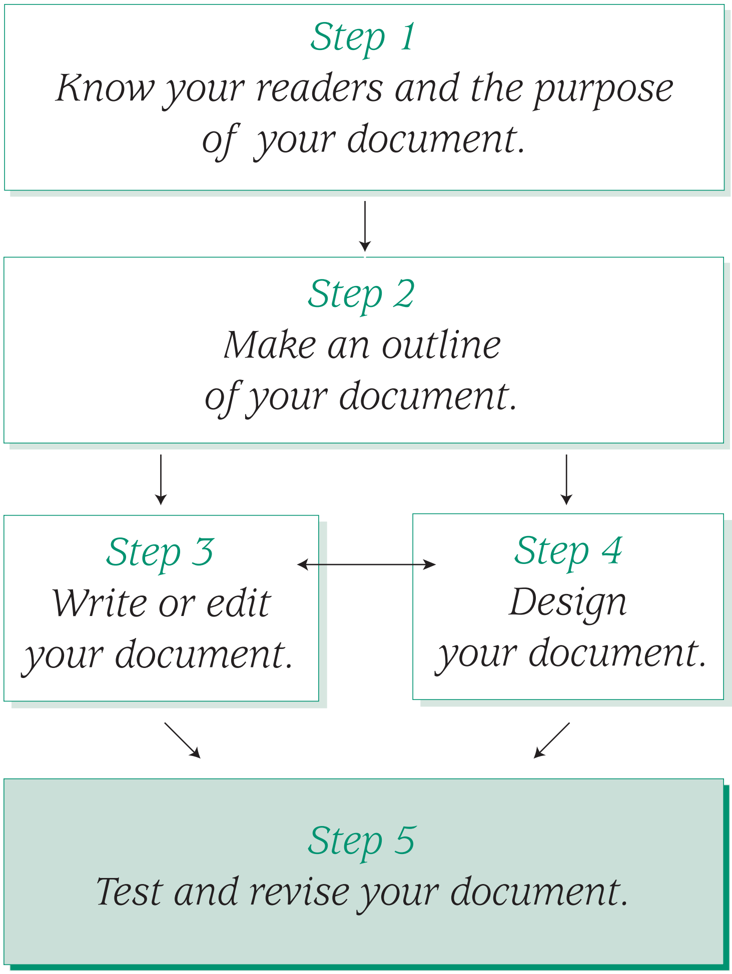
Use photos, charts and other graphics to show information more clearly.

- Make sure your graphics are appropriate for your readers.
- Place graphics close to the text they refer to. Use graphics to enhance the text.

Use colour effectively.

- Use black ink on white paper for a document that is easiest to read.
- Use coloured paper, ink, or shading to draw attention and to make your document attractive. Make sure there is good contrast and the text is clear.

The Plain Language Process



Step 5

Step 5: Test and Revise Your Document



Use this checklist to help you test and revise your document.

- ☑ Read your document out loud.
- ☑ Ask a co-worker to read your document.
- ☑ Use computer checks for grammar and spelling.
- ☑ Do a readability test to assess the grade reading level of your document.
- ☑ Get feedback from a sample of your readers.
- ☑ Use the comments you get to revise your document. Make a final draft.

Read your document out loud.

- You can tell a lot about a document if you read it out loud. For example, does it flow well?

Ask a co-worker to read your document.

- We often miss things in a document we're familiar with.
- You might have a co-worker who is skilled in plain language.

Use computer checks for spelling and grammar.

- Computer grammar checks can help you find passive sentences.
- Computer grammar checks have some ability to estimate grade reading level.

Step 5

Do a readability test.

A readability test tells you the grade level or reading level people should have to read and understand your document.

If your document is:	Aim for:
Essential information for people who have less than 8 years of school or whose first language isn't English.	Grade 5 to 6
Information for the general public that has new terms and concepts or specialized subject matter.	Grade 7 to 9
Specialized information for people who are familiar with the topic and who have good literacy skills.	Grade 10 +

Two readability tests are described here.

The first is the **Fry Readability Test**. Follow the directions and use the graph on page 30-31 to do this test.

The second is the **Reading Effectiveness Tool**. You need a computer and the internet to do this test.

Test the main text. Don't include titles, headings, and subheadings. Try to avoid sections done in point form or with step-by-step numbers.

1) The **Fry Readability Test** has four steps. Use the graph on the opposite page for the fourth step.

   i) Count a 100-word sample. Use up to 5 random samples for longer documents.

   ii) Count the number of sentences in each sample. Estimate the length of the last sentence to the nearest 1/10th (4.3).

   If you have more than one sample, find the average number of sentences per sample. First, add the number of sentences in each sample to get the total number of sentences. (For example, 8.4 + 7.9 + 11.1 + 6.2 = 33.6). Then divide the total number of sentences by the number of samples. (For example, 33.6 ÷ 4 samples = 8.4 sentences)

   iii) Count the number of syllables in each 100-word sample.

   Put a mark above each syllable so you can count them easily. (17 syllables)

   If you have more than one sample, find the average number of syllables per sample. First add the number of syllables in each sample to get the total number of syllables. (For example, 160 + 181 + 172 + 127 = 640). Then divide the total number of syllables by the number of samples. (For example, 640 ÷ 4 samples = 160 syllables)

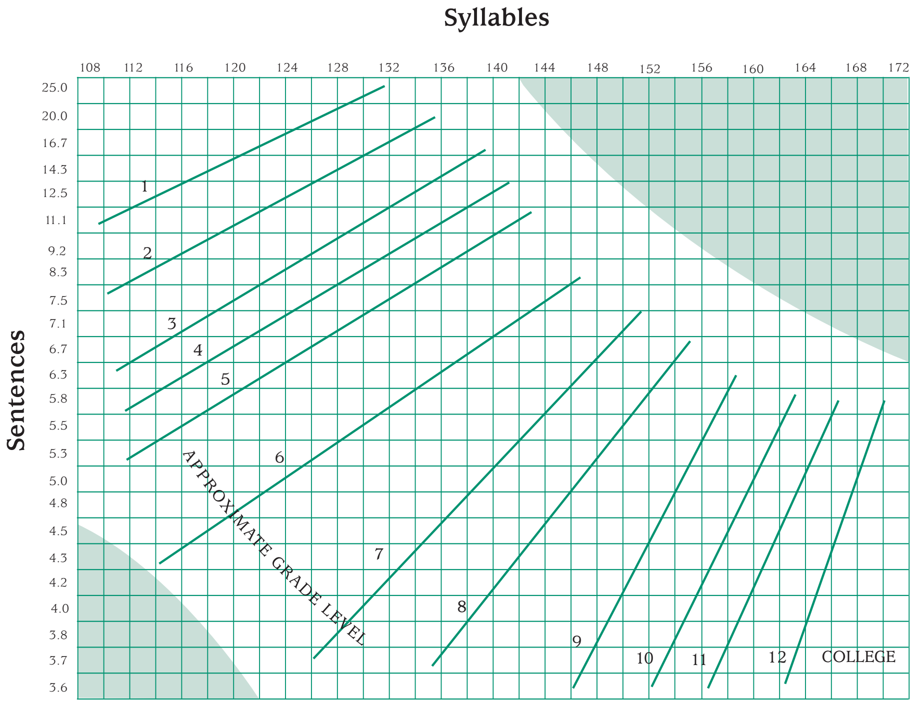
iv) To use the Fry Readability Graph:

- Find the average sentence length on the vertical axis.
- Find the average number of syllables on the horizontal axis.

They intersect at the grade level.

For example, 8.4 sentences on the vertical axis and 160 syllables on the horizontal axis intersect at grade 9 to 10.

Fry Readability Graph



Step 5

2) The **Reading Effectiveness Tool** is on the internet at: www.eastendliteracy.on.ca/clearlanguageanddesign/

   Before you go online:

   - **Know the grade reading level you're aiming for.**
   - **Know the following things about your document:**

     For documents that are 30 sentences long or more:

     i) Find 3 samples, each with 10-sentences, for a total of 30 sentences.
     ii) Count the number of words with 3 syllables or more in the 30 sentences.

     For documents shorter than 30 sentences:

     i) Count all the words with 3 syllables or more.
     ii) Count the number of sentences.

   Now go online. The grade reading level is calculated as you answer a series of questions.

Step 5

Get feedback from your readers.

This is the most useful test. The feedback you get from your readers is well worth the effort and time spent to plan and carry out this test.

Follow these steps to get feedback from your readers:

i) Find a sample of your readers. Other agencies might be able to help.

ii) Decide what questions you want your readers to answer. For example, is the purpose clear? Is there too much or too little information? Can people read, understand, and use the information?

iii) Make a schedule. Decide how much time you expect readers will need to spend to review your document. Decide when you will give them the document and when you want their feedback.

iv) Decide on a process to get their feedback. Will it be a group or individual meeting, in person or on the phone?

v) Contact readers. Be very clear about what you want, the schedule, and the process. Leave room for them to say no. Ensure confidentiality. Offer honoraria if appropriate and possible.

vi) Carry out the plan.

Use the comments you get to revise your document. Make a final draft.

- It might be helpful to test more than one draft of your document. This is very helpful if your document is important for peoples' health and safety, or if it is complex or technical. Use the comments to do a second or a third draft.
- The most important comments come from your readers and the readability test.
- Final decisions about design will partly depend on how you plan to print your document and what cost is involved, if any.

Alternate Words and Phrases



Use this list to find a simple, short, clear word or phrase to replace a complex, long, abstract word or phrase. Add your own favourites to the list.

Alternate Words and Phrases

Change this:	To this:
above-mentioned	this
accompany	go with
accomplish	do
accordingly	so
acknowledge receipt of	have received, got
ad infinitum	endlessly, forever
additional	extra, more
adequate number	enough
adversely affect	hurt
advise	tell, write
affirmative	yes
affix your signature to	sign
afford an opportunity to	let
aforementioned	those, these
annum	year
anticipate	expect
apparent	clear, plain
appear	seem

Alternate Words and Phrases

Change this:	To this:
applicant	you
approximately	about
as to, as per, as regards	about
as a consequence of	because of
as a means to	to
as prescribed	under
ascertain	find out, learn
assist	help
at this point in time	now, right now
at the present time	now, right now
attached herewith is	here is
be in a position to	be able
benefit	help, payment
bona fide	genuine, sincere
by means of	by
by reason of the fact that	because
by virtue of	through
capable	is able, can
causative factor	reason
client	you
commence	start, begin
compensate	pay
complete	fill out
comply with	follow

Alternate Words and Phrases

Change this:	**To this:**
component	part
conclude	end, finish
concur	agree
consequently	so, as a result
consider	think about
constitute	be, form, make up
consult	talk to, see, meet
contains	has
cooperate	help
current residence	home address
deceased	dead
deem	think
deficiency	lack
demonstrate	show
desire	want
determine	figure, find
detrimental	harmful
disclose	show
discontinue	end, stop
disseminate	send, give out, spread
due to the fact that	because
during the time	while
dwelling	home
e.g.	for example

Alternate Words and Phrases

Change this:	To this:
economical	cheap
effect	make
elect	choose, pick
endeavor	try
ensue	follow
enumerate	count
equitable	fair
erroneous	wrong, false
excessive	too many, too much
execute	sign
exhibit	show
expedite	hurry, speed up
expend	pay out, spend
facilitate	make easy, help
factor	reason, cause
failed to	didn't
feasible	can be done
finalize	end
for a period of	for
for the purpose of	for
for the reason that	because
forfeit	lose, give up
formulate	work out, form
forward	send

Alternate Words and Phrases

Change this:	To this:
fundamental	basic
furnish	give, send
has the capability to	is able to, can
henceforth	from now on
herein	here
i.e.	that is
implement	start, begin, do
in accordance with	says, states
in addition to	and
in an effort to	to
in association with	with
in conjunction with	with
in connection with	with
in consequence of	because of
in excess of	more than
in favour of	for
in lieu of	instead of
in order to	to
in receipt of	got, received
in regard to	about
in relation to	about
in the absence of	without
in the course of	during
in the event that	if

Alternate Words and Phrases

Change this:	To this:
in the nature of	like
in the neighbourhood	about
in the vicinity of	near
in view of the fact that	because
inasmuch as	since
inaugurate	begin
inconvenience	trouble
incumbent upon	must
incur	pay for
indicate	way, show
initial	first
initiate	start
insofar as	as long as
insufficient	not enough
interface with	deal with, talk with
locality	place
locate	find
maintain	keep
modify	change
monitor	look at, watch
necessitate	need, compel, force
negative	no
not later than	by
nota bene	please note

Alternate Words and Phrases

Change this:	To this:
notify	tell, let know
notwithstanding	despite
objective	aim, goal
obligated	must
obtain	get
on a daily basis	every day
on a monthly basis	every month
on a regular basis	regular
on the basis of	by, because of
on the grounds of	because of
operational	working
optimum	best, greatest, most
owing to	because
parameters	limits
participate	take part
perform	do
permit	let
personnel	people, workers
pertaining to	about
practically	almost, just about
practitioner	worker
preclude	prevent
premises	building
presently	soon, in a little while

Alternate Words and Phrases

Change this:	**To this:**
prior to	before
proficiency	skill
prohibit	forbid
provide	give, send
provided that	if
purchase	buy
pursuant to	following, under
reason for	why
receive	get
regarding	about, of, on
regulation	rule
relating to	about, on
relocation	move
remainder	rest
remuneration	pay, salary, income
render	give, make
rental unit	apartment, home, place
represent	stand for
request	ask, ask for, demand
require, requirement	need
reside	live
residence	home, address
retain	keep
reveal	show

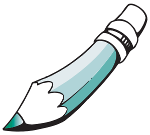
Alternate Words and Phrases

Change this:	To this:
review	check
scenario	outline, picture
selection	choice
shall	must, will
solicit	ask for
spouse	wife, husband
state	tell
statutory	legal, bylaw
strategize	plan
submit	give, send
subsequent	later, next
subsequent to	after
substantial	big, large, great, strong
sufficient	enough
supplementary	extra, more
supply	give, send
sustain	suffer
take action to	act
tenant	you
terminate	end, stop
the manner in which	how
therein	there
thus	so, that way
transmit	send

Alternate Words and Phrases

Change this:	To this:
transpire	happen, occur
until such time as	until
utilize	use
validate	confirm, make sure
vehicle	car, truck
via	in, on, through
warrant	call for
whenever	when
whereas	since
with a view to	to
with reference to	about
with regard to	about
with respect to	about
with the exception of	except for
witnessed	saw

Nouns to Verbs



When you change a noun to a verb, rewrite the sentence. The sentence changes from a passive to an active style. The sentence is also shorter.

Change Nouns to Verbs and Rewrite

Change this:	**To this:**
acceptance	accept
application	apply
approval	approve
assumption	assume
calculation	calculate
certification	certify
complaint	complain
conservation	conserve
consideration	consider
contribution	contribute
decision	decide
deduction	deduct
delivery	deliver
designation	designate, name
deterioration	deteriorate
determination	determine
disclosure	disclose
discovery	discover
disposal, disposition	dispose, sell, give away

Change Nouns to Verbs and Rewrite

Change this:	**To this:**
distribution	distribute
education	educate
enforcement	enforce
examination	examine
inclusion	include
information	inform
investigation	investigate
movement	move
objection	object
payment	pay
persistence	persist
prevention	prevent
promotion	promote
qualification	qualify
reaction	react
recurrence	recur
reduction	reduce
reliance	rely
remittance	remit
residence	reside, live at
resistance	resist
specification	specify
statement	state
submission	submit

Writing Samples

We chose seven writing samples from existing documents to show how your writing can change if you use plain language guidelines.

The first writing sample is from the Workers' Compensation Board brochure for artists and carvers. The first version of this writing sample is from the old brochure. The second version is from the new plain language brochure.

The first version of all other samples is from an existing document. We wrote the plain language versions for this handbook.

There is a Summary Checklist of Plain Language Guidelines at the end of this section.

1) Original writing sample:

From the old brochure *"Coverage for Artists and Carvers"*, Workers' Compensation Board

HOW TO REGISTER FOR COVERAGE AS AN ARTIST OR CARVER

1. **Contact the Workers' Compensation Board and register as an Independent Operator.**
   Your application will be approved only after it is confirmed that you are an Independent Operator in good standing. (If your work is commissioned or if you produce your work as an employee of another individual or company, you may not qualify.)

2. **Provide the Board with an estimate of your gross yearly income.**
   You will be required to provide proof of your income.

3. **Obtain Personal Optional Coverage by paying the appropriate assessment.**
   If you choose not to have optional coverage, you will not be eligible for any of the benefits listed on this brochure.

4. **Renew your coverage annually.**
   This coverage is not continuous. An application for renewal must be made each year prior to December 31st.

A plain language version:

From the new *"Artists and Carvers Program"* brochure, Workers' Compensation Board

How Do I Register?

- Call the WCB and tell them you work for yourself as an artist or carver.
- You will need to show the WCB how much money you make in a year.
- You will buy insurance from the WCB.
- You need to talk to the WCB about this once a year to renew your coverage.

2) Original writing sample:

From the brochure
"*Home Adaptations for Seniors' Independence*"

WHAT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE IS AVAILABLE?

Assistance in the form of a forgivable loan of up to $2 500 is available. This loan does not have to be repaid provided that the homeowner agrees to continue to occupy the unit for the duration of the loan forgiveness period. If the adaptation work is being done on a rental unit, the landlord must agree that rents will not increase as a result of the adaptations. The loan forgiveness period is 6 months and may be reduced in extenuating circumstances. Repayable loans are not available.

A plain language version:

What Financial Assistance is Available?

- You can get a forgivable loan for up to $2,500.
- If the loan is for your own house, you have to live there for at least 6 months. This is the loan forgiveness period. It can be shorter than this if necessary.
- If you're a landlord, you can't increase the rent because of changes you made with the loan.

3) Original writing sample:

From the brochure
"A Guide to the Labour Standards Act"

GENERAL HOLIDAYS

The Labour Standards Act establishes ~~nine~~ 10 general holidays in the Northwest Territories. They are:

- New Year's Day
- Good Friday
- Victoria Day
- Canada Day
- National Aboriginal Day
- First Monday in August
- Labour Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Remembrance Day
- Christmas Day

The Act sets out conditions an employee must meet to be eligible to receive general holiday pay. An employee must have worked for that employer on 30 work days in the 12 months prior to the general holiday; have reported to work on the general holiday if called to work; have reported to work on both the last scheduled work day before the general holiday and the next regular scheduled day following the holiday; and not be on pregnancy or parental leave. Generally, if an employee meets the conditions and does not work on the general holiday, he or she is entitled to a regular day's pay. If the employee meets the conditions summarized above and works on the general holiday, he or she is entitled to either another day off work with pay, or a normal day's pay plus 1.5 times the regular rate of pay for the time worked on the general holiday.

If the employee meets the conditions and the general holiday occurs on what would be a non-working day, and the employee does not work, then he or she must be paid a normal day's pay. As an alternative, the holiday may be transferred to another day.

For example, where New Year's Day occurs on a Sunday (a non-working day for the employee) the employer may transfer the holiday to Monday or to another day.

A plain language version:

General Holidays

There are 10 general holidays every year:

1) New Years Day
2) Good Friday
3) Victoria Day
4) Canada Day
5) National Aboriginal Day
6) First Monday in August
7) Labour Day
8) Thanksgiving
9) Remembrance Day
10) Christmas Day

Employees who work on a holiday either get holiday pay or a day off work with pay if they:

- worked 30 days in the year before the holiday; and
- worked the scheduled day before and the regular scheduled day after the holiday; and
- aren't on pregnancy or parental leave.

Holiday pay is a regular day's pay plus 1.5 times regular pay for the hours worked on the holiday.

Employees who don't work on a holiday get their regular pay if they meet these conditions.

Samples

4) Original writing sample:

Newspaper ad – shown 68 % of actual size

Special Committee on the Implementation of Self-Government and the Sunset Clause

PUBLIC HEARINGS

We want to hear from you!

The Special Committee on the Implementation of Self-Government and the Sunset Clause will be conducting public hearings to hear the different views of citizens on options for addressing the Sunset Clause. The Committee has been tasked with considering all options and providing its recommendations in a report to the Legislative Assembly. This is your chance to influence their report and recommendations.

The Sunset Clause was introduced by the previous Assembly to try and motivate the current Government to deal with representation issues brought on by the settlement of self-government negotiations. These negotiations have yet to conclude but the Sunset Clause, if left alone, will effectively dissolve the current electoral districts and prevent this government from holding any future elections. All powers and authority would then revert back to the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories.

Public Hearing Process

The public hearings will take place:
Wednesday, February 27 from 10:30 am - 12 pm and
from 6:30 pm - 9:00 pm and
Thursday, February 28 from 6:30 pm - 9:00 pm
in Committee Room 'A' of the
Legislative Assembly in Yellowknife.

Interested persons or organizations wishing to appear before the Special Committee should contact the Committee Clerk listed below, no later than **3:00 p.m., Friday February 22, 2002.**

To register as a witness, or to obtain further information, please contact the Committee Clerk.

Corey McLachlan, Assistant Committee Clerk
Special Committee on the Implementation of
Self-Government and the Sunset Clause
Legislative Assembly of the NWT
Yellowknife, NT, X1A 2L9
Phone: (867) 669-2218 or toll-free: 1-800-661-0784
Fax: (867) 873-0432 or
toll-free fax: 1-800-661-0879
E-mail: corey_mclachlan@gov.nt.ca



A plain language version:

If the Sunset Clause is left alone,
electoral districts will dissolve.
There won't be any more elections.

How Many Electoral Districts Should There Be?

What are the options?
Come to a public meeting.

Legislative Assembly
Wed., Feb. 27, 10:30 – noon
Wed., Feb. 27, 6:30 – 9:30 p.m.
Thur., Feb. 28, 6:30 – 9:00 p.m.

To speak at the Public Meeting,
please register by 3 p.m. Friday, February 22.

To register or get more information:

Phone:	(867)669-2218 or 1-800-661-0784
Fax:	(867)873-0432 or 1-800-661-0879
E-mail:	corey_mclachlan@gov.nt.ca

5) Original writing sample:

From the 2001-2002 Student Guide for the NWT Student Financial Assistance Program

The NWT Study Grant for Students with Disabilities

The NWT Study Grant is available to assist students with permanent disabilities (visual or hearing impairments and other physical or learning disabilities are among the types of disabilities covered) who are studying in postsecondary institutions. You can apply for the benefit at any time during your academic year. Applications for the NWT Study Grant require medical or other appropriate documentation about your disability and the manner in which it limits your ability to participate fully in postsecondary studies.

Based on an assessment of your educational needs, eligible students may receive up to $5,000 per academic year. You must enroll in courses that represent at least 40% of a full time course load. If your educational needs exceed the NWT Study Grant for Students with Disabilities you can also receive funding under the Repayable Loan.

The Study Grant may be used to cover exceptional educational expenses such as the cost of a tutor, an interpreter (oral, sign), note taker, transportation, attendant care or special equipment. The grant will also reimburse students for up to 75% of the cost of a learning disability assessment (up to $1,000).

A plain language version:

NWT Study Grant for Students with Disabilities

Who can apply?

Postsecondary students with permanent disabilities who have at least a 40% full course load.

When should you apply?

Any time during your school year.

How do you apply?

Fill out the form (which one?). You need to include medical information about your disability and how it affects your studies.

How much money will you get?

If you're eligible, you can get up to $5000 per year. If you need more money, you can apply for a Repayable Loan.

What can you use the money for?

You can use the money to pay for:

- a tutor.
- an oral or signing interpreter.
- a note taker.
- transportation.
- attendant care.
- special equipment.

You can also get back 75% of the cost of a learning disability assessment, up to $1,000.

6) Original writing sample:

From the Excluded Employees' Handbook. GNWT, April 2001.

EXCLUDED EMPLOYEES' HANDBOOK **LEAVE**

If you do not return to work, the amount of SUB Plan benefits must be reimbursed to the Government. If you return to work for less than six months, the SUB Plan benefits will be pro-rated. An exception is made for death, disability and lay-off.

The SUB Plan provides a "top up" of Employment Insurance benefits to a maximum of 17 weeks at 93% of your last weekly rate of pay.

The Employer is not responsible for any consequences of an employment insurance benefit overpayment nor is it responsible for providing any additional payments in respect of maternity leave should the employee's benefits be affected by tax, employment insurance, or legislative provisions.

Parental Leave (Without Pay)

If you will have actual care and custody of a newborn child of whom you are the natural mother or natural father, or an adopted child, parental leave without pay may be granted to you for up to 26 weeks in the 52 week period immediately following the birth of the child or, in the case of an adoption, the time that the child comes into your care and custody.

Parental leave may be shared by an employee couple, but the total amount of parental leave cannot exceed 26 weeks for both employees combined.

If you intend to request parental leave you must make every effort to provide reasonable notice to the Employer. In the case of an adoption, you must notify the Employer as soon as the application has been approved by the adoption agency or legal guardianship or custody papers have been drawn up.

If you are taking maternity leave, you may also take parental leave, in which case, it must be taken immediately following the maternity leave. The total amount of maternity and parental leave combined cannot exceed 52 weeks.

A plain language version:

Parental Leave Without Pay

If you've just had a new baby or adopted a child, you can take time off work without pay.

Parental leave starts when your baby is born or when the adopted child comes to live with you. You can take 26 weeks off work in one year. A couple can share the parental leave. Pregnant women can add parental leave to their maternity leave for a maximum of 52 weeks combined leave.

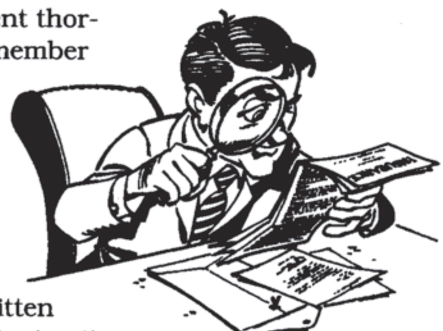
Give your employer lots of notice. If you're adopting a child, tell your employer when the adoption is official.

7) Original writing sample:

From the booklet
"Information for Landlords and Tenants"

TENANT TIPS

- Carry out an incoming inspection of the rental premises with the landlord and complete in duplicate the condition report at the commencement of your tenancy.
- Read the tenancy agreement thoroughly before signing. Remember you are responsible for that which you agree to if it is not in contravention of the *Residential Tenancies Act.*



- Ensure the landlord has given you a copy of the written tenancy agreement after signing it.
- Ensure you are given a receipt for the security deposit and all rental payments.
- After moving out and cleaning the rental premises, complete the "Outgoing" portion of the inspection report.
- All notices to your landlord should be in writing keeping copies for your records.
- Request for maintenance and or repairs should be made to the landlord in writing keeping copies for your records.
- Ensure that your personal property is totally insured as the landlord's insurance covers the building and his or her personal property.
- Determine before you sign the tenancy agreement if it is a month to month agreement or for a fixed term.
- Read through this booklet and especially the tenant's obligations section of the *Residential Tenancies Act.*

A plain language version:

Tenant Tips

- ✓ Inspect your home when you first move in. Do this with your landlord. Write down what you see during the inspection. Make a copy for yourself and your landlord.
- ✓ Read your rent agreement before you sign it. You are responsible, unless the agreement breaks the law.
- ✓ Make sure your rent agreement is the terms you want. It can be month-to-month or for a fixed term, like a year.
- ✓ Get a copy of your rent agreement from your landlord after you sign it.
- ✓ Get a receipt when you pay the security deposit and every time you pay rent.
- ✓ Get insurance for your personal property.
- ✓ Keep a written record if you ask your landlord to fix something or if you notify them of something.
- ✓ Clean your home when you move out. Inspect the place with your landlord to make sure you agree it is okay and get this in writing.

Summary Checklist of Plain Language Guidelines

Which plain language guidelines were used to rewrite each sample?

- [ ] State your purpose clearly. Know your readers.
- [ ] Introduce your document.
- [ ] Organize your ideas in logical order.
- [ ] Divide your document into short sections.
- [ ] Put the most important information first.
- [ ] Use headings and subheadings.
- [ ] Include a Table of Contents for longer documents.
- [ ] Use simple, short, clear words.
- [ ] Write short sentences with just one idea in each sentence.
- [ ] Use a positive tone.
- [ ] Use an active writing style.
- [ ] Write short paragraphs.
- [ ] Use point form or lists where appropriate.

- [ ] Use white space to break up the text.
- [ ] Highlight important information.
- [ ] Use a font style and size that people can read easily.
- [ ] Use photos, tables, charts and other graphics to show information more clearly.
- [ ] Use colour effectively.